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From the outside, the gathering of 12 women inside the sewing room of Sun City MacDonald Ranch might look like any other community group.

They drink coffee and chat about their lives while seamlessly working at their machines.

But these women, members of the Las Vegas Sew Girls, are coming together and sewing with a purpose.

For the last five years, while soldiers have been on the front lines fighting, these Henderson women have been in a back room of Desert Willow Clubhouse at Sun City MacDonald Ranch, 2020 W. Horizon Ridge Parkway, using their talents to make adaptive clothing for injured soldiers.

"You never hear about our wounded," said Emilie Karczewski, vice president of the Las Vegas Sew Girls. "When they come (to the hospital), they don't even have a basic wardrobe."

The injuries she has heard about range from burns to amputations. Even if they had basic items - shirts, pants, boxer shorts - Karczewski said many might not wear them because the clothing doesn't accommodate, and in some cases irritates, the injury.

"They need comfortable clothing while they are in the hospital and while they are recovering," Karczewski said. "It helps them feel normal again as they go through the recovery process."

Each month the national nonprofit Sew Much Comfort, from which Las Vegas Sew Girls stems, sends out updates on what items are needed.

"We send out pieces twice a month," said Johannah Lockwood, the group's president.

Once collected at Sew Much Comfort's offices in Colorado, the clothing is sent to military facilities nationally and abroad.

Karczewski estimates the Las Vegas Sew Girls have made 3,396 items to date that are designed specifically to work with the wounded. Michele Cuppy, the founder of Sew Much Comfort, said has distributed more than 122,000 pieces since the organization started in 2004.

"We are so grateful to have them," Cuppy said. "We send them our requests, and they never say 'No.' "

Like many of the women in the group, Karczewski started sewing when she was younger out of necessity.

"I wanted a new dress as a kid, so I taught myself how to sew," she said.

She heard about Sew Much Comfort from a friend about five years ago and never imagined that her hobby could help with more than assembling pieces for friends and family.

When creating the Las Vegas Sew Girls, Karczewski said she wanted it to be a separate nonprofit from the national group to ensure that money donated was spent locally.

The group still receives updates from Sew Much Comfort informing it on what items are needed.

Cuppy said Sew Much Comfort has groups around the country with about 500 volunteers making items.

"We probably get about 120 wounded per month," she added.

Once orders are placed, Lockwood goes out to buy shirts, pants, fabric and any other needed materials.

"I usually buy shirts in blocks of 200," she said.

The first and third Wednesday of each month, the group gathers from about 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. making anything from sweat pants and pajama bottoms to T-shirts.

"We even do boxer shorts," Karczewski said.

The adaptive clothing is designed to accommodate people's medical devices or situations, such as large prosthetics or bulky casts. The group takes items, adds a side seam and attaches it with Velcro to make it easier to put on or take off during physical therapy or while military members are still in the hospital.

"(After they are assembled) I do a quality check before sending them off," Lockwood said.

In addition to helping with comfort, Karczewski thinks having these items helps those recovering psychologically as well as physically.

"It helps with their self-esteem," she said.

The group has received letters from those who have received the items, and sometimes their parents also, thanking them for their contributions.

"They can go out to lunch and look normal wearing a shirt opposed to a hospital gown," Karczewski added.

Even as the United States has decreased military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan, the group has had a steady amount of items requested.

"There is still a need," she said.

Karczewski doesn't know the future of military service in Afghanistan, but she hopes there is an end in sight.

"As long as there is a need," she added, "we will be at our machines."

For more information, call 702-260-1621. For more information about the national organization, visit sewmuchcomfort.org.

Contact Henderson/Anthem View reporter Michael Lyle at mlyle@viewnews.com or 702-387-5201.